



South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



EVERY FRIDAY IS RED SHIRT FRIDAY AT FARMERS STATE BANK IN PARKSTON

The mission of Red Shirt Fridays is to show our servicemen and service-women and their families that we support them and that we will not forget them.



members of the 153rd Engineer Battalion from Parkston. Their shirts not only pay tribute to the 153rd, but they are branded with "Home of the Free, Because of the Brave." Thank you FSB staff for supporting our troops and their families!



Governor Dennis Daugaard proclaimed every Friday R.E.D. Shirt Friday in South Dakota while our troops are deployed. R.E.D. stands for "Remember Everyone Deployed"

A BIG SHOUT OUT goes to Farmers State Bank in Parkston. You can walk into the bank on any Friday and you will see a "sea of red!" The employees don their red shirts specifically honoring the

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SD GUARD FIREFIGHTERS TRAIN, PREPARE FOR UPCOMING DEPLOYMENT

South Dakota Army National Guard firefighters trained on structural, vehicle and aircraft burns, vehicle extractions, and confined space rescues in the Rapid City area, May 6-20.

Firefighters with the Rapid City based-216th and 451st Engineer Detachments focused their annual training on preparing for emergency fire-related situations that they may encounter during a deployment.

The training is of particular importance as three soldiers with the 216th are scheduled to deploy to Romania in July where they will oversee multiple firefighting teams.

"The harder you practice, the more proficient you will be out on the fire grounds," said Spc. Matthew Komes of the 451st. "It all comes together when we get deployed overseas. Everything we do during annual training is incorporated."

The firefighters were able to call on multiple resources to augment their training, which included Western Dakota Technical Institute, who provided space for confined space rescue operations and structural burns, said Komes.



The detachments contracted the services of a specialized training simulator, specifically designed to simulate a fire on board an aircraft. This allowed the firefighters to actually enter the aircraft, after suppressing the fire, and conduct clearing operations to enhance the realistic nature of the training.

"The simulator was different than any training the unit's have ever been through," said Komes. "When we conduct training at Ellsworth Air Force Base, it involves jet fuel so we aren't allowed to go into the aircraft.

With this new simulator, we are able to go into the aircraft, fight the fire and

do our rescues."

"We train as we fight," said Sgt. 1st Class Austin Hagen, fire chief for the 216th. "Our guys got to conduct training on an aircraft trainer that we had not seen before. The trainer did an excellent job and our guys got to do some hands on training that we normally don't get to do."



BHNC MEMORIAL DAY PROGRAM

The Black Hills National Cemetery will host two Memorial Day ceremonies on Monday, May 29. Both ceremonies will be held at the Committal Shelter/Flag Pole area.

The first program will start at 11:00 am (MT) and is sponsored by the South Dakota American Legion and the keynote speaker is Rod Martin. The second program will be held at 1:00 pm (MT) and is sponsored by the Oglala Sioux Tribe. The keynote speaker for this program will be Troy Scott Westin, Oglala Sioux Tribe President.

The VA operates 134 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico. More than 4 million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in the VA's national cemeteries. The VA also provides funding to establish, expand, improve, and maintain 100 veterans cemeteries in 47 states and territories including tribal trust lands, Guam, and Saipan. For veterans not buried in a VA national cemetery, the VA provides headstones, markers or medallions to commemorate their service. In 2015, the VA honored more than 353,000 veterans and their loved ones with memorial benefits in national, state, tribal and private cemeteries.



SDDVA CONDUCTS SPRING MINI CONFERENCE VIA SKYPE

Using technology, SDDVA ventured down a new path by conducting our Spring Mini Conference via Skype.

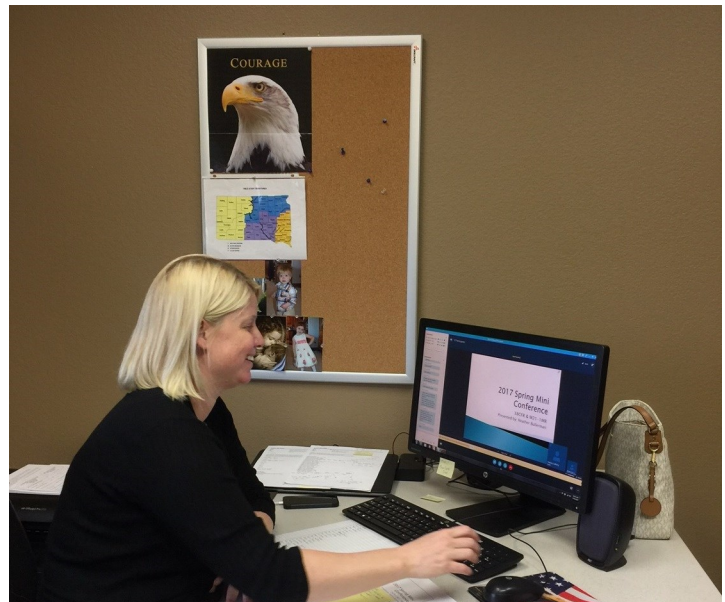
CTVSOs and SDDVA staff were able to join the training session from the comforts of their offices. No windshield time and less impact on travel budgets.

Topics covered during this training session included 38CFR and the M21-1MR. Program Manager Heather Bullerman reviewed book tips, internet searches, and VetraSpec tools.

Copies of the presentation were shared with all participants prior to the training and have been posted on the VSO portal.

Using Skype for this presentation afforded all participants to hear questions from all participants rather than just those from their region.

The SDDVA Benefit School will be held August 14-17, at the Ramkota Conference Center in Pierre. VSOs can book their reservations by calling 605-224-6877 and asking for the Veterans Affairs block of rooms or by emailing reservations@pierreramkota.com.



CARE AND BENEFITS FOR VETERANS STRENGTHENED BY \$186.5 BILLION VA BUDGET

In his fiscal year (FY) 2018 budget, President Trump is proposing \$186.5 billion for the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The budget request will ensure the nation's veterans receive high-quality health care and timely access to benefits and services. The budget also supports the continued transformation of the VA to rebuild the full trust of veterans as a premier provider of choice for their services and benefits.

"The 2018 budget request reflects the strong commitment of the president to provide the services and benefits that our nation's veterans have earned," said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. "The VA has made significant progress in improving its service to veterans and their family members. We are fully committed to continuing the transformation across the department, so we can deliver the standards of performance our veterans expect and deserve."

This year's budget request includes 82 legislative proposals that will help enable the VA to better serve veterans.

Highlights From the President's 2018 Budget Request for VA

The FY 2018 budget includes \$82.1 billion in discretionary funding, largely for health care, and \$104.3 billion in mandatory funding for benefit programs, such as disability compensation and pensions, and for continuation of the Veterans Choice Program (Choice Program). The discretionary budget request is \$4.3 billion (5.5 percent) above the 2017 enacted level, including nearly \$3.3 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and veteran copayments. The budget also requests \$74 billion, including collections, for the 2019 advance appropriations for medical care, an increase of \$1.7 billion and 2.4 percent above the 2018 medical care budget request. The request includes \$107.7 billion in 2019 mandatory advance appropriations for Compensation and Pensions; Readjustment Benefits; and Veterans Insurance and Indemnities benefits programs in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

Health Care

With a total medical care budget of \$75.2 billion, including collections and new mandatory funding for the Choice Program, the VA is positioned to continue expanding health-care services to over 7 million patients. Health care is being provided to more than 858,000 veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn/Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Major categories funded within the health care budget are:

- \$13.2 billion for community care;
- \$8.8 billion for long-term care;
- \$8.4 billion for mental health care;
- \$1.7 billion for programs for homeless and at-risk Veterans;
- \$751 million for Hepatitis-C treatment;
- \$604 million for Caregivers' benefits; and
- \$316 million for treatment of traumatic brain injuries.



VA BUDGET (CONTINUED)

Expanding Access

The president's budget ensures that care and other benefits are available to veterans when and where they need them. Among the programs that will expand access under the proposed budget are:

- \$13.2 billion for community care, compared with \$11.2 billion in 2017, a 13 percent increase;
- \$505 million for gender-specific health-care services for women, an increase of 7 percent over the 2017 level;
- \$862 million for the activation of new and enhanced health-care facilities;
- \$855 million for major and minor construction projects, including a new outpatient clinic at Livermore, California, and expansion of cemeteries at Calverton, New York; Sacramento, California; Bushnell, Florida; Phoenix, Arizona; Bridgeville, Pennsylvania; and Elwood, Illinois.

Disability Compensation Claims Backlog and Appeals Reform

VBA has continued aggressive efforts aimed at bringing down the disability compensation claims backlog, completing a record-breaking 1.3 million claims in 2016 and reducing the claims backlog by 88 percent, cumulatively, from a peak of 611,000 claims in March 2013 to 71,690 on Sept. 30, 2016. In 2016, veterans waited, on average, 203 fewer days for a decision than four years ago. In 2018, VBA is projected to complete 1.4 million claims, and the number of claims pending longer than 125 days is anticipated to remain at about 70 thousand claims. This pending claims status may change as the volume of claims receipts increases or decreases, and as claims processing becomes more efficient. VBA's success in reducing the rating claims backlog has also resulted in a growing appeals inventory.

From 2010 through 2016, VBA completed more than 1 million disability compensation rating claims annually. Approximately 11 percent to 12 percent of VBA decisions are appealed, with nearly half of those being formally appealed to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (the Board). While the appeal rate has remained steady over the past two decades, the appeals volume has increased proportionately to the increase in claims decisions. The average processing time



for resolving appeals in 2016 was three years. For those appeals that reached the board, average processing time was six years, with thousands of veterans waiting much longer.

The VA has worked with Congress, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and other stakeholders to develop a legislative proposal to reform the appeals process. The appeals process under current law is ineffective and confusing, and veterans wait much too long for a decision on appeal. The new process will: 1) establish options for veterans, 2) provide early resolution and improved notifications as to best options, 3) eliminate the perpetual churn of appeals inherent to the existing process, 4) provide veterans feedback loops to VBA, and 5) improve transparency of the process by clearly defining the roles of VBA and the board throughout the appeals process.

Appeals reform is one of VA's top legislative priorities, and the department will continue to work with Congress and the VSOs to ensure veterans receive the best possible service.

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VA BUDGET (CONTINUED)

Improving the Veteran Experience

National Call Centers (NCCs): In 2018, the VA expects the NCCs to sustain the average speed of answering in 30 seconds or less, while maintaining exceptional customer satisfaction.

National Work Queue (NWO): In 2017, disability compensation claims are moving through the process faster than before implementation of the NWO process — on average, claims are ready for decision 14 days faster. In 2018, NWO will be expanded to other key VBA priorities such as the non-rating and appeals workload distribution.

Veterans Claim Intake Program (VCIP)/Centralized Mail: By the end of 2018, VCIP will relocate the entire file banks of remaining Regional Offices and convert the documents electronically, an integral element of VBA's comprehensive transformation and modernization strategy.

In 2018, Centralized Mail will build upon sustained progress in disability compensation and expand to additional stakeholders, to include the Board of Veteran Appeals, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, Fiduciary Service, Support Services Division, Debt Management Center (DMC) and Loan Guaranty.

Veterans Homelessness

The budget requests \$1.7 billion for programs to prevent or reduce veteran homelessness, including:

- \$320 million for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) to promote housing stability;
- \$543 million for the HUD-VASH program, wherein the VA provides case management services for at-risk veterans and their families and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides permanent housing through its Housing Choice Voucher program; and
- \$257 million in grant and per diem payments that support transitional housing provided by community-based organizations.

Veterans Choice Program—Community Care

The VA is requesting a total of \$13.2 billion in 2018 for Veterans Community Care. This consists of a request for \$9.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Medical Community Care account, plus an additional \$2.9 billion in new mandatory budget authority for the Choice Program. When combined with \$626 million in estimated start-of-year unobligated balances from the original Choice Program appropriation, the total Community Care funding level is \$13.2 billion in 2018. The budget also requests \$3.5 billion in mandatory budget authority in 2019 for the Choice Program. This additional funding will allow the VA to continue increasing veterans' access to health-care services by allowing them to choose the VA direct care or community care.



(continued)

VA BUDGET (CONTINUED)

Other Key Services for Veterans

- \$306 million to administer the VA's system of 136 national cemeteries, including funding for the activation of three new cemeteries that will open in 2018 and 2019. Funds are also included to raise, realign, and clean headstones to ensure the VA national cemeteries are maintained as shrines.
- \$4.1 billion for information technology (IT), including investments to strengthen cybersecurity, modernize veterans' electronic health records, improve veterans' access to benefits, and enhance the IT infrastructure; and
- \$135 million for state cemetery grants and state extended-care grants.

Enhanced Oversight of VA's Programs

The 2018 budget requests \$159.6 million for the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to enhance oversight and assist the OIG in fulfilling its statutory mission of making recommendations that will help the VA improve the care and services it provides.

SFVAHCS MEMORIAL DAY PROGRAM

The Sioux Falls Veterans Council sponsors the annual Memorial Day program at the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System. The Sioux Falls municipal band will kick off the ceremony with a musical prelude at 10:00 am (CT), with the official program starting at 10:30 am (CT) near the Veterans Memorial on the VA campus.

The popular El Riad Fife & Drum Corps will be part of the program. The keynote speaker is Jackie D. Frisby-Griffin, Colonel, US Air Force, retired.

In case of inclement weather, the program will move to VFW Post 628

A BIG SHOUT OUT TO THE SFVAHCS

SDDVA extends a big "SHOUT OUT" to the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System for receiving national recognition for achievements in sustainability,

This is in recognition of programs to reduce environmental impact.

The Sioux Falls VA received the Partner for Change Award from Practice Greenhealth, the nation's leading organization dedicated to environmental sustainability in health care.



23 SD ARMY GUARD UNITS RECEIVE NATIONAL SUPERIOR UNIT AWARD

Twenty-three out of 42 South Dakota Army National Guard units received the National Guard Bureau's Superior Unit Award (SUA) in recognition of outstanding achievement during training year 2016.

The SUA is presented to units who meet highly-enforced military standards in the areas of personnel, training and readiness.

In order to earn the SUA, units must achieve 95 percent in unit strength, monthly drill attendance, annual training attendance and weapons qualification. In addition to meeting these readiness goals, units must also achieve 90 percent in physical fitness tests and duty-qualified soldiers. Unit admin and maintenance inspections also factor into award requirements.

The top award for the state went to the 147th Army Band of Mitchell, which received the Eisenhower Trophy for the most exceptional SDARNG unit. The Eisenhower Trophy is named in honor of former General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower and awarded by the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to the ARNG unit in each state rated the most outstanding during the training year.

More than half of the SUA units are continuing consecutive years of training excellence - with four units receiving the award for the second time in a row, three units for a third straight year and five units for four consecutive years. The 211th Engineer Company has earned the SUA five years in a row and the 740th Transportation Company has received it five out of the last six years.

This year's recipients of the Superior Unit Award include:

Battery A, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion **** - Aberdeen
 740th Transportation Company ** - Aberdeen and Milbank
 Headquarters Company, 139th Brigade Support Battalion - Brookings
 115th Signal Company - Brookings
 Headquarters Company, 153rd Engineer Battalion **** - Huron
 Forward Support Company, 153rd Engineer Battalion **** - Huron and Parkston
 211th Engineer Company ***** - Madison and De Smet
 147th Army Band - Mitchell
 Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion - Mitchell
 200th Engineer Company **** - Pierre, Chamberlain and Mobridge
 Detachment 1, Company B, 1-112th Aviation Battalion - Rapid City
 Detachment 5, Company C, 2-641st Aviation Battalion - Rapid City
 Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment - Rapid City
 82nd Civil Support Team *** - Rapid City
 SDARNG Training Center *** - Rapid City
 SDARNG Medical Command *** - Rapid City
 451st Engineer Detachment (Firefighters) - Rapid City
 155th Engineer Company **** - Rapid City and Wagner
 235th Military Police Company - Rapid City and Sioux Falls
 1st Battalion, 196th Regional Training Institute - Sturgis
 842nd Engineer Company ** - Spearfish, Belle Fourche and Sturgis
 Headquarters Battery, 147th Field Artillery ** - Watertown
 Battery B, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion ** - Yankton

** Denotes second straight year for receiving the award
 *** Denotes third straight year for receiving the award
 **** Denotes fourth straight year for receiving the award
 ***** Denotes fifth straight year for receiving the award



MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

BLACK HILLS VETERANS JOB FAIR

June 28, 2017
11:00AM—4:00PM
Western Dakota Tech
800 Mickelson Drive
Rapid City, SD 57703

Connect with local and national employers!



Register today at: <https://2017blackhillsveteransjobfair.eventbrite.com>

Scan QR Code to register



Follow us @BlackHillsVeteransJobFair

Download the **Career Fair+** App to register and follow BHVJF updates

Early entry to Job Fair and preparation class available only to those who pre-register.

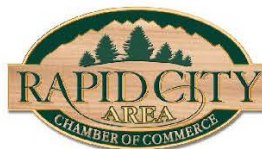
Childcare services will not be available at the Job Fair or Preparation Class.

**Job-Seeking
Dependents
Welcome!**

Job Fair Preparation Class:

June 21, 2017
9:00AM—10:00AM
Dept. of Labor, 2330 N. Maple Ave.
Rapid City, SD 57701

Event Contact: Scott MacDonald, scott.macdonald.ctr@mail.mil
(605) 737-6011



Upcoming Events

Jun 10—SD Marine Corps League Annual Meeting—Pierre Post 8 (520 W. Pierre Street) - 10:00 am (CT)
Jun 15-18—SD American Legion State Conference—Watertown—Ramkota
Jun 22-25—State VFW Convention—Pierre—Ramkota
Jun 28—Black Hills Veterans Job Fair—Western Dakota Tech
Jul 14—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Building 145—Room 108—Fort Meade—10:00 am (MT)
Aug 14-17—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Pierre—Ramkota
Sept 11—VA Black Hills Mental Health Summit



Veterans Bob Laing and Clarence Jerke took a day off from their normal routine at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home and attended school for a day.

It was the last day of school for the Hot Springs Elementary School students and who better to hand out certificates at the awards ceremony than a couple of our great South Dakota heroes!!!!

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